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Creators:	Burnham, John
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OUR NEW WEAPON, THE ROCKET

By JOHN BURNHAM, Engr. I

THE Bazooka, a U.S. Army invention, has attracted attention as an anti-tank gun for use by raiding and reconnaissance parties. Light and easily carried, it supplants the field gun in small operations. There is no recoil to the gun, as it is merely a hollow cylinder, with electric attachments for firing.

In 1942 there came reports that both the Russian and German armies were using rocket-type projectiles on the eastern front. Rocket guns were used in airplanes in place of cannon, because of their lack of recoil. A second rocket weapon was a multiple rocket projector used by the Russians against the German tanks. The tanks found it very difficult to dodge the shotgun-like discharge of this weapon.

The Russians used their rocket guns with unusual success in the Battle of Stalingrad. Up to that time the Russians had kept their invention a closed secret but they now divulged the fact that they were using the rocket principle. Mounted on trucks, for increased mobility, the Katusha was shown firing its projectiles in a film released by the Russian army about the Battle of Stalingrad.

The rocket, far from being new to warfare, has been used at various times for over three thousand years. The ancient Chinese, inventors of explosives, used rockets in their campaigns of thousands of years ago.

The English first used rockets in naval warfare about 1800. These rocket guns, highly effective against the enemy, were mounted on boats of special design, and were fired in salvos. In 1813 the Rocket Troop of the British Royal Artillery first saw service against Napoleon in the Battle of Leipzig.

Rocket detachments were common in the European armies for a half century following this. They all seem to have rendered "excellent service," but were never of sufficient importance to receive much notice.

The English rockets of the nineteenth century were fired from metal cylinders mounted on tripods, by touching the rocket charge fuse with a piece of burning tinder. A fairly accurate aim was taken through a sight on the side of the barrel.

Military experts of the period regarded the rocket gun as fairly effective against massed troops not more than eight hundred yards away, and as an incendiary shell against inflammable

structures. However one of the reasons for the unimportance of the rocket in nineteenth century warfare was that there was as yet no suitable victim for its unusual properties.

The invention of the tank brought the rocket gun out of the dormant state it had been in and made it an important weapon in this war, by giving it a target suited to its capabilities.

The first rocket, invented by Congreve, had a stick projecting from the back of the rocket on which were mounted fins, to keep the rocket on its course. Hale introduced an improvement on this pattern, by removing the stick and so arranging the rocket charge projection that the gases emerging from the vent struck screw-shaped vanes, thus inducing a rotary motion. The range was increased up to fifty percent by this change.

About the last half of the nineteenth century, the rocket was abandoned for military use, and although the Germans did research on them before the first World War, they do not seem to have been used.

It is remarkable in military history that a weapon once discarded should come back into general use. But the rocket gun is an unusual weapon and the rocket principle a sound one.